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Three of the Army's oldest units celebrate National Guard birthday in Kosovo

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CAMP BONDSTEEL -- The National Guard celebrated its 370th Birthday on Dec. 13, and three of the oldest military units in the nation honored the day with a cake-cutting ceremony in the Serbian province of Kosovo as part of Multi-National Task Force (East) and the 29th Infantry Division (Forward).

Brig. Gen. Douglas Earhart, commander of MNTF(E) hosted the cake-cutting ceremony at the Camp Bondsteel North Dining Facility Wednesday evening. Earhart cut the cake along with the youngest Soldiers from each of the respective units.

The Soldiers, Pfc. Randy Demand, Pfc. Joseph Levesque and Spc. Eric Varela demonstrated their cake cutting prowess as they assisted Earhart. Demand, age 19, serves as a cavalry scout in B Troop, 2nd Squadron, 182 Cavalry; Levesque, age 19, is an infantryman in Company A, 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry and Varela, age 20, is a combat engineer assigned to A Company, 101st Engineers. Demand is a native of Salisbury, Mass., Levesque is from Springfield, Mass. and Varela is from Peabody, Mass.

"It is a special honor to be here with these young Soldiers representing three of the oldest units in the National Guard," said Earhart. "The fact that we are deployed here in Kosovo demonstrates the important role we all play as Citizen-Soldiers. Just like the militia men answered the call at Lexington and Concord, these Soldiers answered the call to duty here in Kosovo to help promote the ideals of peace and freedom in a foreign land."

The three units from the Massachusetts National Guard - 1st Squadron, 182 Cavalry, 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry and A Company, 101st Engineers are recognized as three of the oldest units in the United States military. The units arrived in late November and took charge of their respective areas of operation in Kosovo on Dec. 6 as part of Operation Joint Guardian.

MNTF (E) is part of a larger NATO-led international force known as the Kosovo Force (KFOR). KFOR is responsible for establishing and maintaining security in Kosovo. The organization entered Kosovo on June 12, 1999 under a United Nations mandate, two days after the adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244.

The objectives of KFOR are to establish and maintain a secure environment in Kosovo, including public safety and order; to monitor, verify and when necessary, enforce compliance with the agreements that ended the conflict; and to provide assistance to the U.N. Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

The National Guard traces its history back to 1636 when the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which functioned as the colony's legislature, ordered existing militia companies from the towns surrounding Boston to form into three regiments: North, South and East.

While other English colonies like Virginia and Spanish colonies like Florida and Puerto Rico had individual towns with militia companies before 1636, Massachusetts was the first place in the New World where the population was large enough to justify organizing companies into regiments for command and control.

These regiments became a kind of military “family” for members. Although their names have been changed and individual companies have come and gone, the three regiments still exist in the Massachusetts National Guard.

1st Squadron, 182nd Cavalry

The 1st Battalion, 182nd Infantry Regiment traces its origins to the North Regiment which was constituted and organized on October 7, 1636 from existing train bands at Charlestown, New Town, Watertown, Concord, and Dedham. After several redesignations over the following years, the unit was redesignated prior to 1733 as the 1st Regiment of Militia of Middlesex.

The unit served in the American Revolution and continued serving under several different unit designations through the early 1800s.

The unit was ordered into active service for the defense of Washington on April 19, 1861 with attached companies from the 1st and 7th Regiments of Infantry, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, and Major Cook's Light Artillery Company. It was mustered into federal service on May 1, 1861 at Washington, D.C., for three months service, and assigned to the 1st Brigade, 3rd Division. It participated in the first battle of Bull Run before being mustered out on August 1, 1861 at Boston. The unit served in various capacities before being mustered out on November 16, 1864 at Readville and resumed state status.

The unit continued to serve until inactivated on November 29, 1945 at Fort Lewis, WA. The regiment (less 2nd Battalion which inactivated on December 2, 1945 at Fort Lawton staging area, WA) was relieved from the Americal Division and assigned to the 182nd Regimental Combat Team on July 8, 1946. It reorganized and was federally recognized on December 5, 1946 with headquarters at Charlestown. Its Headquarters relocated to Melrose on September 30, 1955.

The unit was relieved from the 182nd Regimental Combat Team on May 1, 1959 and reorganized as the 182nd Infantry under the Combat Arms Regimental System.

In recent years, the 182nd has supported Operations Noble Eagle, MFO Sinai, and deployed one Troop in support of relief effort to New Orleans. The unit was re-designated the 1st Squadron, 182nd Cavalry in 2006 as part of the Army transformation plan and was deployed as to KFOR as Task Force Patriot.

181st Infantry

The 181st Infantry (Light) is one of the five oldest units in the U.S. military, tracing its lineage back to 1632. It was formed in 1636 as part of the Massachusetts Militia. The unit fought during the King Phillips War, repulsing various raids by Native Americans. In 1775, Paul Revere led the regiment against British forces on Lexington Green and in Concord.

During the Civil War, the unit was the first to defend the nation's capital and later campaigned in Virginia. The unit arrived in Cuba in 1898 to fight in the Spanish-American War and became a National Guard unit in 1907.

The unit participated in World War I and II, and in World War II as part of the 26th Yankee Division. The unit became the 181st in 1921 and was assigned to the 26th Inf. Div. in

1923, remaining in that division until 1991, when it deactivated. In 1996, the unit became part of the 29th Inf. Division.

The 1st Battalion, 181st Infantry Regiment, deployed as part of SFOR 10 to Bosnia-Herzegovina, as part of the command Task Force Eagle as part of the ongoing rotation of active Army and Guard divisions in support of Operation Joint Forge.

An element from Company A, 181st Infantry (Light), based in Worcester, was mobilized for Homeland Defense and comprised Natick Lab's Installation Defense Force.

On September 19, 2003 the 2/116th transferred authority and the mission of supporting Joint Task Force Guantanamo to the 1/181st Infantry Battalion of the Massachusetts Army National Guard.

101st Engineers

The 101st Engineer Battalion was originally organized in 1636 as The East Regiment from existing militia companies of Saugus, Salem, Ipswich, and Newbury. After numerous redesignations and name changes, in 1855 it changed to The Eighth Infantry, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia.

The Eighth Infantry was mustered into Federal Service on April 30, 1861 as The Eighth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and served in several campaigns until the regiment again entered Federal Service July 26, 1864, for one hundred days and mustered out November 10, 1864.

The unit served in Cuba and coastal defense duty during World War I. On March 30, 1920 the 101st Regiment of Engineers and Train, Massachusetts National Guard, was organized. It was re-designated as the First Regiment of Engineers and Train, September 1, 1920, and then First Engineers, November 30, 1921. It was re-designated 101st Combat Engineers September 30, 1921.

A Co, out of Newburyport MA, is deployed as Task Force Semper Lex, Multi-National Task Force (East).

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